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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRETORIA 000639

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/27/2018
TAGS: PREF PREL ZI SF EAID
SUBJECT: HUMANITARIAN ORGANIZATIONS TAKE WAIT AND SEE
APPROACH TO ZIMBABWE ELECTION

PRETORIA 00000639 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Donald Teitelbaum. Reasons 1.4(b) and
 (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. On 27 March, the International Organization
for Migration (IOM) held its last Interagency Contingency
Planning meeting on Zimbabwe before the 29 March election.
Everyone in the room agreed that a spontaneous mass exodus of
Zimbabweans into neighboring countries is the least
likely/worst case scenario. At the same time, however,
organizations remain concerned about the possible
humanitarian consequences in the election aftermath. For
now, numerous international organizations are setting up
small-scale operations near the border as part of their
wait-and-see approach. END SUMMARY.

NOTHING BEING TAKEN FOR GRANTED

¶2. (C) PolOffs attended on 27 March IOM's last Interagency
Contingency Planning meeting on Zimbabwe before elections on
March 29. Hans-Petter Boe, IOM's Regional Representative for
Southern Africa, opened the meeting by saying that IOM cannot
predict whether or how the election will affect migration
flows, saying the results could cause more to leave Zimbabwe,
or alternatively, encourage some to go back home. Boe added
that the situation is much more complex than it was in 2002
or 2005 because of the added "push factors," including
economic decline, worthless currency, and lack of health
care, all of which are heightening the potential for
political violence.

¶3. (C) Abel Mbilinyi, Deputy Representative for UNHCR in
South Africa, believes a spontaneous exodus is unlikely, but
could see a slow, steady pace continue over the next several
months into neighboring countries, especially South Africa
and Botswana. He admitted his organization is grappling with
a timeframe to monitor the effects of the election.
"Saturday is by no means D-Day for us," he said. For now, he
is estimating UNHCR will carefully watch events for at least
the month of April. If a second round of voting is needed,
the UNHCR will standby until then, perhaps a bit longer.

¶4. (C) UNHCR is also concerned about third-country nationals
getting caught in Zimbabwe, in which case they would try
their best to connect them with their host country consular
officers. They are also worried about Zimbabweans who could
be declared stateless, like members of the former Federation
of Northern or Southern Rhodesia. (NOTE: Members of the

former Federation of Northern or Southern Rhodesia are mostly farm workers from Malawi or Zambia who came to work in Zimbabwe while it was under colonial rule, but who have never obtained legal documents from the independent Zimbabwean government. END NOTE) UNHCR estimates there are thousands of people in this predicament, though they do not know how many would try to flee.

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LEAST-LIKELY SCENARIO: SPONTANEOUS MASS EXODUS
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¶5. (C) All agencies in the room agreed that a spontaneous mass exodus was the worst-case/least likely scenario, in which case Boe believes the threatening gaps will be health services, emergency food supply, and shelter. However, UNHCR cautioned that there are potential parallels to be made between Kenya and Zimbabwe. First, no one believed Kenyans were capable of such violence after the December 2007 Qwere capable of such violence after the December 2007 election. Second, UNHCR believes it is possible, as was the case in Kenya, that everyone will be convinced that the opposition has won but will not be declared the winner. In Zimbabwe's case, Mbilinyi said either a MDC victory could spark a violent response from the security sector or a Mugabe win could spark a violent response from the opposition. The UN Department of Safety and Security Representative also mentioned that two weeks ago, a petition from the Zimbabwe Revolutionary Youth Movement was dropped off to UN Headquarters in South Africa vowing to remove Mugabe at all costs if he wins.

WAIT-AND-SEE APPROACH

¶6. (C) Most international organizations present at the meeting have already set up small-scale operations close to

the border to monitor the situation:

     -- The Jesuit Refugee Services opened a "3 to 5 room warehouse" in Machado, which they believe will be a natural base for refugees because of the surrounding hills. JSR will provide limited emergency response, including counseling, clothing, food, and up to 40 beds.

     -- Catholic Relief Services is helping the Diocese of Tzaneen stockpile emergency supplies.

     -- Save The Children UK just established 3 drop in centers for unaccompanied and vulnerable children. (NOTE: IOM saw 4,000 unaccompanied children cross Beitbridge in 2007, according to Boe. END NOTE)

     -- South Africa Red Cross just received 150,000 Swiss francs to train local volunteers and to give migration assistance.

     -- UNICEF did not say whether they were on the border or not and have decided not to stockpile. However, they are willing to provide warehouse space in Johannesburg to other organizations if needed.

     -- Oxfam is currently on the border and going ahead with stockpiling.

     -- IOM has opened a "one-person shop" this week in Musina to expand its existing programs (including HIV prevention programs targeting migrant workers, raising awareness of risks of human trafficking, advocacy of migrants rights, and information dissemination to migrant populations), but this office would not mount a humanitarian response. Instead, IOM Nairobi would help with health concerns and IOM Geneva would help with emergency response.

Boe also stated that the IOM is prepared to assist the SAG if it decides to mount a humanitarian response.

-- UNHCR started posting people in Musina starting 27 March for the next 2-3 weeks, but they will not establish a satellite office unless they see the need. They also have been "sensitizing border officials, who seemed receptive," and are trying to get border officials to encourage Zimbabweans to apply for asylum at the border so they can better monitor trends. Last year, only 4 Zimbabweans applied for asylum at the border (compared to about 1,000 from other countries), while 18,000 Zimbabweans applied in other parts of South Africa. (COMMENT: The Oxfam representative pointed out that Zimbabweans do not apply at the border because they are discouraged, but because they fear being deported while awaiting a SAG decision. END COMMENT)

-- WHO is not on the border but is urging all involved to provide condoms and post-exposure prophylaxis as part of the emergency food package, because "whether we like it or not, people are going to be having sex and vulnerable women and children are going to be raped," said WHO Representative Stella Anyangwe. (NOTE: Medicines Sans Frontiers (Belgium) and Oxfam are holding health sector cluster meetings in Musina this week. END NOTE)

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SOUTH AFRICA STILL GRAPPLING WITH CONTINGENCY PLANNING
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¶7. (C) The SAG has had contingency plans in the works for a while now, but "even South Africa would admit it's limping at this point," Boe said. Interdepartmental meetings are being held in Limpopo Province (closest to Zimbabwean border) this week, but Boe has heard they are not going well. Mbilinyi said that the Minister of Home Affairs personally sent her Qsaid that the Minister of Home Affairs personally sent her DDG up there this week to try to work things out. South Africa has repeatedly said it will not open any camps; however, Mbilinyi believes this could end up being a case of semantics as "reception centers" can quickly turn into camps.
 The Oxfam representative also raised the possibility that should a humanitarian crisis occur, the SAG, given "its penchant for ignoring problems," would never get around to declaring an emergency.
TEITELBAUM